

***Address by Hon. (Mrs) L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun,
Minister of Education and Human Resources,
Tertiary Education and Scientific Research***

***Launch of the Africa Platform
for Regional Integration Development Effectiveness (PRIDE)
at the Open University of Mauritius***

06 January 2017

Distinguished Guests

Good afternoon-- and I believe it's not too late to wish you all a Happy and professionally rewarding New Year!

I would wish at the outset to thank the Open University of Mauritius for inviting me to launch the PRIDE platform. As you are all aware, the PRIDE Initiative led by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was endorsed at the Second High Level Meeting of the Global Partnerships for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), held in Nairobi from 30 Nov to 1 Dec 2016.

Validation has thus been secured for the Open University to run a virtual facility to disseminate formal training on Regional Integration.

And that, in itself, is a landmark achievement for the Mauritius Africa Agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius strongly believes in Regional Integration and Cooperation. We believe the future lies in the countries of our Continent pledging to mutually support and assist one another – and, as the former Secretary General of the UN, Mr Ban Ki-moon,

stated in Busan, in 2011,

“Assistance is not charity. It is smart investment in security and prosperity.”

This has also been strongly echoed by the UN Economic Commission for Africa that has stated that

“ Africans must seek growth that is primarily anchored on their priorities

and that is capable of delivering structural transformation.

Regional

integration is a key strategy for development.”,

Again, the report, themed “Connecting Africa’s Markets in a Sustainable Way”, which is jointly produced by the African Development Bank, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum, goes in the same direction. It avers that regional integration is a key vehicle for helping Africa to raise competitiveness, diversify its economic base and create enough jobs for its young, fast-urbanizing population.

Let me then state that, viewed from this angle, PRIDE becomes more than a moral imperative. This initiative is today playing a key role in creating partnerships to support collective cross-regional needs in Africa within the frameworks of North-South, South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

Let me underscore the fact that such partnerships are salutary for all parties concerned.

For the Open University itself, it will be a win-win situation. Thus, while the University will endeavor to fulfil its new regional responsibility, it will also stand to benefit from spin-offs. These will arise from an active collaboration with and support from the

Djibouti Institute for Diplomatic and Strategic Studies as well as from the institutional linkages with the network of IGAD. I am informed that such a network comprises prestigious institutions like the University of Nairobi, the Addis Ababa University, the African Research and Resource Forum, to name only a few.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When people talk of Africa, more often than not the conversation is skewed against its take-off. Everybody seems to be bent on emphasising what is not working -- weak institutions, regular conflicts, a persistent infrastructure deficit, and low levels of health and education.

Again, when we talk of the African Renaissance, the immediate question is, can it ever be sustainable?

Agreed, these are serious challenges that need to be addressed to ensure sustained growth and development.

But let us see the positives:

Africa's average growth rate has been more than 5% over the past decade and such a growth is also accompanied by a growing consumer market and labour force.

The Continent has equally wised up to two major and interconnected realities—one, that it has a vast youth whose potential has as yet not been fully tapped, and, two, the reality of education as a driver of change and transformation.

Let's have a reality check: Agenda 2063 is founded on 7 Aspirations. The front cover opens on the first aspiration for a "prosperous Africa based on growth and sustainable development"

and the back cover closes on the 7th aspiration of making Africa “a strong, united, resilient and influential global player”.

However, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, our Continent can only be a prosperous and resilient global player when there is a greater investment in knowledge and learning. Whether it is AU’s Agenda 2063 or the UN SDGs, Education has been positioned at the heart of transformative change –for education, above anything else, is instrumental in lifting people away from the inter-generational poverty cycle.

Needless to say that, here again, one of the key solutions is definitely working together—and one of the key elements of PRIDE is partnership among institutions.

Distinguished Guests,

The Government of Mauritius is endeavouring to strengthen and deepen regional integration.

One example is the Mauritius-Africa Scholarship Scheme.

The Government of Mauritius through my Ministry is awarding fifty scholarships to deserving students who are resident citizens of member states of the African Union. The Scholarship Scheme supports candidates in meeting tuition fees and contributes to their living expenses during their studies in Mauritius. Furthermore, the airfare from and back to the country of origin of the student is also covered.

Additionally, there is a distance education scholarships offered by the Open University of Mauritius to our brothers and sisters of Africa.

Not only that. We realise that an expanding African middle class has set its sights on higher education—indeed, every year, around

800,000 Continental students leave secondary education and opt to go into higher education.

For a multiplicity of reasons, many are turning out to be extra-territorially mobile.

Mauritius is today responding to this need and is in a position, both in terms of higher education institutions and programmes, to offer a high quality tertiary education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With every gain comes a spate of responsibilities.

Through the establishment of this Platform for Regional Integration Development Effectiveness, the Open University of Mauritius has now a significant responsibility to ensure that it meets all objectives and accomplishes what is being promised. I am confident that this young and dynamic institution will live up to our collective expectations and excel as usual in this challenging enterprise.

I will personally be proud to meet learners emerging from PRIDE training programmes and see them shine at international level. I sincerely wish that this project succeeds as it has the power of transforming the region and the world by developing leaders and diplomats who will create the harmony for bringing minds and countries together. Gradually, this will revolutionise the way people live and co-exist, and hence create peace and unity among individuals.

Let us therefore not underestimate the far-reaching powers of what is being launched today at the Open University of Mauritius.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me also seize this opportunity to thank

our guest H.E. Ambassador (Eng.) Mahboub Maalim, the Executive Secretary of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Let me also thank Mr Moussa Ali, Director from the Djibouti Institute for Diplomatic and Strategic Studies, with whom the Open University will work closely within the PRIDE initiative. It is a pleasure welcoming you in Mauritius and at the Open University of Mauritius. We hope we have left a favourable impression on you and that we'll continue working together, consolidating our ties for a better world.

Allow me to end with a congratulatory note for the Board, management and staff of the Open University of Mauritius for their relentless work over the years, enabling the university to achieve high levels of performance and propelling the country forward on the global scene.

I am now deeply honoured today to announce the launch and establishment of the Africa Platform for Regional Integration Development Effectiveness at the seat of the Open University of Mauritius.

Thank you for your kind attention.